

EDDYSTONE :

BY

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"Ille, velut pelagi rupes immota, resistit ;
ut pelagi rupes, magno veniente fragore,
quae sese, multis circum latrantibus undis,
mole tenet ; scopuli nequidquam et spumea circum
saxa fremunt, laterique illisa refunditur alga."


Aeneid, l. 7, v. 586.

. "trepidis ubi dulcia nautis
lumina noctivagae tollit Pharus aemula Lunae."

STATIUS, l. 3, *Silv.* c. 5, v. 100.

1881.

BIRMINGHAM :
THE HERALD PRESS, 16, UNION STREET.



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EDDYSTONE.

I.

Athwart the sea a hundred fathoms, prone
 Thou liest, Spectre of primeval Time;
 Dark terror yet, though now about thee thrown
 Love's flaming spell attests with strength sublime
 Thy broken power of harm: still overclimb
 Thy pinnacles the mad storm-spirits, still
 At midnight in a wizard pantomime
 Around thee all the winds unloosed for ill
 Chase all the eddying streams, and heaven's full cloud-cups spill.

II.

And e'en when brooding Summer's golden haze
 Enfolds thee, or when falls the silent snow
 On drear calm levels spread to seaman's gaze,
 Thou stirrest the tumultuous heart below
 Of the vexed waters that in ceaseless flow,
 Borne from Atlantic fountains, lave thy feet,
 And search thy sides with eager undertow,
 And circling on thy shoulders part and meet,
 And o'er thy dinted crest for ever break and beat.

III.

Thou Matterhorn of Ocean, whose proud head
 Looked solitary to meridian stars,
 And frowned back lightnings hurled from skies of lead,
 And bent not before hurricanes though spars
 Ship-ravished struck and strewed thee! Stains and scars
 Of salt and vapour tinged thee; sea-spoils swathed;
 Life shuddering fled thee, for thy cold clasp mars
 All earthly life, and, in thy whirlpools bathed,
 No hapless human form emerges thence unscathed.

IV.

What imaged flux and lapse of men hast thou,
 Set steadfast mid eternal surges, seen
 While days grew centuries! Many a Roman prow
 Rounding Ocrinum's triple head, for green
 And sunny Vectis bound, betrayed between
 Thy hidden tusks, was broken, nor availed
 Fond invocations of Dione, queen
 Of sea and sky, when nether gods assailed,
 And weltering on thy crags the Imperial eagles trailed.*

V.

A thousand years, and air and wave perchance
 Smiled gay around thee when the exulting ships
 Bore England's Edward home, and John of France,
 Captor and captive—Valour's full eclipse
 By Valour larger-orbed—or when from lips
 Impassioned rung on Dart's or Lara's banks
 "Welcome to Warwick! Hail the hand that strips
 The rotting roses from their pallid ranks,
 And strikes down faithless kings who know not ruth or thanks!"

VI.

A hundred years, and thou, dark Eddystone,
 Wast ringed by crescents of far-gleaming fire
 Through lucid shades of summer midnight known
 To straining eyes on many a cliff and spire,
 The Armada. Then in all their patriot ire
 Rose the great Captains, bent sail, speeded forth
 And quenched for aye Sidonia's hot desire
 In flame and storm, a sea-girt kingdom's worth,
 And barred him from the South, and loosed on him the North,

* "Amathusias renidens,
 Salis arbitra et vaporis,
 Flos siderum, Dione."
Aurelius Symmachus.

VII.

Till ocean tossed him homeward. Once again
 Old Rock, across thy echoing ridges spake
 Guns jubilant of victory, haughty Spain
 The vanquished, and the dying victor Blake:
 Calm Evening lit the glorious vessel's wake,
 Drooped every flag, responded not a gun
 While he whose name had made her foemen quake,
 Heart, eye turned still to England, passed, the son
 Of all her shining roll most dear, most bright—save one.

VIII.

Nor only prowess in the battle-smoke,
 Nor only strength and love to guard the land,
 Made heroes then: the stout Saint George that broke
 At Santa Cruz old tyrannies new-planned,
 Or anchored, bulwark of the Devon strand,
 Symbolled not England more or English men
 Than did the Mayflower with her weakling band
 But strong, like the pure knight with strength of ten,
 Flying 'neath Freedom's star from blind Oppression's den.

IX.

Such sorrows, triumphs, circled round thy head,
 Stone of the Eddy, voiceless, lifeless, dark,
 Save when the sea-bird shrieked, or storm-cloud shed
 Light which is ruin on thy splinters stark;
 Or when through breakers drifted from her mark,
 The homeward-bound reeled shuddering, till with leap
 Like hunted thing she met thy teeth of shark,
 And the long wail from the encumbered steep
 Was scattered to deaf skies, and o'er the pitiless deep.

X.

At length men rose against thee, and upreared
 A beacon on thy brow: then, curbed and tamed
 To nobler use, the spectral rocks he feared
 Stood to the midnight helmsman self-proclaimed.
 Soon was the gift revoked, the triumph maimed:
 Thou bad'st thy stormy ministers of ill,
 Who struck the feeble tower grotesquely framed,
 And laughed at human skill—if *this* were skill,
 And quenched the light and life that counterchecked thy will.*

XI.

But, mailed and weaponed by robuster Art,
 Pity essayed and won thee yet again,
 As seaborne Marinel by Britomart
 Was vanquished, and for fifty years her chain
 Of mercy bound thee, and without a stain
 Floated above thee England's flag, set higher
 Among the nations thus.—Vain, ever vain
 The hope of rest! Avenged and freed by Fire,
 Thou sawest thy breakers glow around the flaming pyre, †

XII.

Mocking the far horizon—signal-light
 Of ghostly threatening. Then a silence fell,
 A darkness spread, unbroken as the night
 Of death, save only by the hiss and swell
 Of waves exulting at the vanished spell,
 Or star-rays glinting coldly on their crest:
 Man's little power, like some surf-driven shell,
 Was shivered on the granite of thy breast:
 Again the unbridled seas could work thy wild behest.

Winstanley's tower, 1700-1703.

† Rudyerd's tower, 1709-1755.

XIII.

“Furit Natura, Ars coërcet,” wrote

He whose bold work had half the century spanned:
 Traced sternly in Art’s ashes was the note
 Responsive from majestic Nature’s hand,
 The all-abiding. E’en the next who planned
 His lighthouse from the earthfast forest tree—
 In form, not substance—laying many a band
 Of kindred rock, O Eddystone, on thee,
 Knew well the boundless power that binds yet leaves us free.*

XIV.

Wise Master! never that consummate shaft
 Or inner flame defaced, or tempest shook;
 Full type and triumph of its builder’s craft,
 The western waves dashed over it, it took
 The waves unfaltering: from its lantern-nook
 The lamps shed gladness on the brow of Night,
 And Carteret saw them, outward bound, and Cook,
 Ambassadors from Britain’s peace and might
 To lightless seas, and lands that knew not Christian light.

XV.

Still, through vicissitude of cloud and sun,
 And men and nations, stood the Signal fast,
 So long that wheeling sea-birds learned to shun
 The gleaming lantern which in ages past
 Had woo’d and maimed their wings; so long that mast
 And sail and hull new forms on forms outwore,
 Evolving ever—as the protoplast
 Ark—Argo—nautilus, to Science bore
 The steel-clad thunderer grim that guards the island shore.

* Smeaton’s tower, 1759.

XVI.

But thou, stern Crag, who couldst not dispossess
 The trophy on thee of its stubborn hold,
 With sudden shock of elemental stress,
 As he, the imperial Incubus, was rolled
 From off the nations' necks by concert bold—
 Witness Mount Edgcumbe, or Bellerophon
 That bore him captive past thee!—thou didst mould
 A subtler weapon, crumbling slow thine own
 Deep-shelving sides to shed the hated granite cone:

XVII.

Slow crumbling, mining still, with ceaseless fret,
 The sea, thy servant, works, and sure as slow,
 Nor hastes nor lingers when the task is set,
 Like its own pulse eternal, or the flow
 Of Time about the stars. The coral so
 Swells to its mighty bulk inversely; sands
 Silver and smooth from wave-washed boulders grow;
 And foam-flecked breadths or amber-tinted bands
 Tell how the secular surge has dealt with ravished lands.

XVIII.

The end would come, and whether in the night,
 When Dian wears her storm-wove robe of cloud,
 While shines out then the rival lamp more bright
 To the dark offing; or when boometh loud
 The morning gun, and in the landbreeze proud
 The signal-pennant plays: we wait it not,
 The inevitable: ere the old be bowed
 We build the new, which neither force shall blot
 Nor treachery mine, till Earth such words hath all forgot.*

* Douglass's tower, 1881.

XIX.

We build on firmer base, with loftier hope;
 The granite shell sits broader on the rock;
 The light will search the sea with larger scope
 And tenfold beam. All mists that veil and mock,
 All winds and tides that baffle, shoals that shock,
 Must yield them to the giant lenses' might,
 Which, drawn from stores the passing hours unlock,
 Instinct with central flame serenely bright,
 Will flash their splendours soon across the waste of Night.

XX.

Fair type and fruit of Science! latest type
 Of her who lives to *see*, and dares to *do*,
 But fruit whose growth of centuries is not ripe,
 While Nature hides yet from her children's view
 Her rarest secrets. When from all we knew
 Long since, or still shall know—from far and wide
 And high and deep, we gather and subdue
 The electric force, and store it at our side,
 Light will outshine the sun, and Life be glorified.

XXI.

Dark ruthless Eddystone? no longer so,
 But noble, merciful, and reconciled,
 Shalt thou be called. Thy Gothic name may flow
 From Ida, stern Northumbrian, Woden's child—
 Ida the king, impetuous, restless, wild—
 Flame-bearer to the Briton, for he bore
 The battle-kindling torch; but thou, O mild
 Flame-bearer of the world, shine more and more,
 Briton and Breton both, in peace from shore to shore!*

* Eddy = Gothic *ida*. Ida, A.D. 547, is styled Flamddwyn in Taliesin's poems, or *flame-bearing*.

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PRINTED AT THE HERALD PRESS, 16, UNION STREET.
